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ABSTRACT

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: ITS POWER AND INFLUENCE ON PRIMARY CHILDREN'S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Education

Biola University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

By

Joanne Yoona Park

Fall 1999

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M.A. Thesis

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La Mirada, California

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Fall 1999

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Abstract

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: ITS POWER AND INFLUENCE
ON PRIMARY CHILDREN'S LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Joanne Yoona Park

Current articles on the power and influence of children's literature on primary children's literacy development and achievement were reviewed. Research indicates that literature has a positive effect on the academic achievement of children and that literacy skills are essential components of academic success. Children who have been exposed to literature from an early age often develop faster reading achievement, language, vocabulary, and writing skills. Literature is an effective tool in teaching, developing, and shaping the minds of young children.

Introduction

Children's literature in the United States originated as early as the 16th century, created to develop and nurture children's moral reasoning skills. Although very few children's books were published during that time, children's books were influential and didactic in nature, with the purpose of teaching moral values. These books reflected society's view that children need to learn how to be good, hardworking, and morally upright citizens (Lynch-Brown, Tomlinson, 1998).

In addition to being didactic, children's books during that time were multicultural. Until the 18th century, the books available to American children were international children's literature originating from Europe. These books were translated into English for American children. However, very few children had access to books. During that time, children did not have formal schooling and could not read. But by the end of the 19th century, all of that changed. The public education system became established in the United States and a number of children's literature emerged in publishing houses across the nation. Now, as we approach the 21st century, children's books are readily accessible in local bookstores, libraries, schools, and even in individual homes. Today, the wealth of books written for children to enjoy and choose from is astounding.

Review of the Literature

Children's Literature: It's Power and Influence

Unlike the past, today's children's books are not purely devoted to didactic teachings. Instead, there is an abundance of genres and resources available in children's literature. In general, children's literature can be divided into ten categories: picture books, poetry, folklore, fantasy, science fiction, realistic fiction, historical fiction, biography, and nonfiction. In each of these genres, teachers can choose books to integrate into his or her curriculum that will be educating, enjoyable, and enlightening for their students. However, because of the variety of choices available, both teachers and parents need to find books that are appropriate in level and content for their children.

Developing a Desire to Read. Even with the abundance of literature available today, *aliteracy*—having the ability to read but lacking the motivation—is a widespread concern in the United States. Researchers are concerned that American children have negative attitudes toward reading (Moser, Morrison, 1998). In a list of activities children choose to do on their spare time, reading is low on the priority scale. In fact, reading occupies one percent or less of their free time. Research further reveals that 50% of children read books for an average of four minutes per day or less, 30% read two minutes per day or less, and 10% never reported reading any book on any day (Moser, Morrison, 1998). With these statistics, some researchers believe that it's not enough for schools to teach children how to read; schools must also teach children a desire to read so they will become life-long readers.

According to author Bernice E. Cullinan in *Invitation to Read: More Children's Literature in the Reading Program* (1992), children's literature can play an important part in the development of a child. Cullinan (1992) declares that "Reading to children lays the groundwork for their liking to read, getting hooked on good stories, and choosing to read on their own frequently" (p. xii-xiii). She states in her book that the more children read from an early age, the more they are likely to read as adults.

There are numerous positive results when children are read to from an early age, according to Cullinan (1992):

1. Children learn that reading is pleasurable, that it is something they want to be able to do.

2. Children learn about the structure of stories—that stories have beginnings, middles, and endings. They learn that some stories begin the same way ('Once upon a time . . .') and end the same way ('. . . they lived happily ever after.') and that the action of certain characters is predictable.

3. Children learn the concepts behind print: that print carries meaning; that printed text remains the same and can be read again in the same way; that print is read in a specific direction; that printed words correspond to spoken words; and that pictures carry clues to meaning and vocabulary.

4. Children begin to build a frame of reference for literature and to find out how books work. They learn that books are written by authors and that pictures are done by illustrators. They also become acquainted with certain genres of literature (rhymes, folktales, picture books, informational books, and longer chapter books).

5. Children learn new words and increase their vocabularies. They become familiar with terms such as title, dedication, author, illustrator, characters, fairy tales, and poetry. They learn about the sounds of language—such things as rhyme, rhythm, and alliteration—as well as believable dialogue. And they learn that every subject has its own vocabulary. (p. 4)

With the wealth of positive experiences children gain from children's literature, educators need to find ways to encourage children to read and to help them become self-motivated readers. One way to cater to young children's endless sense of curiosity is through children's literature. Storybooks can help young children explore, investigate, interact with, and make sense of their surroundings. By connecting children to literature, both parents and teachers can develop children into highly motivated readers who want to read and choose to read for a wide range of personal reasons.

"If we teach a child to read, yet develop not the taste for reading, all our teaching is for naught. We shall have produced a nation of 'illiterate literates'—those who know how to read, but do not read," states Charlotte S. Huck in *Reaching Children and Young People through Literature* (Painter, 1971, p. 37). She continues, "The major purpose for teaching children to read is to help them become readers who readily turn to books for information and enjoyment."

Building Successful Readers. Researchers encourage parents to read to their infants at birth (Soundy, 1997). Studies reveal that the earlier parents read to their children, the higher the emergent reading levels of their children at the end of kindergarten. In fact, researchers believe that children who have early exposure to

literature enjoy being read to, delight in storybooks, and take great pleasure in the interaction with their parents. These young children learn early on that books give them pleasure and these joyous experiences become one of the main factors of motivation in their learning (Soundy, 1997). As these children continue on with formal literacy instruction in school, studies reveal that children who frequently read books become fluent adult readers.

Studies further indicate that children who have been exposed to literature from an early age often develop faster reading achievement, language, vocabulary, and writing skills (Lynch-Brown, Tomlinson, 1998). These children also learn how to critically think about books and stories (Ouellette, Dagostino, Carifio, 1999).

Cullinan illustrates in her book that children who become fluent readers are those who were read to early on. She (1992) states, "Frequent and positive contact with books creates interest in reading; increased interest results in more reading; more reading results in better reading. It's as simple as that" (p. xiii).

Acquiring Language Acquisition. Children's literature can also be an effective tool in helping young children acquire language acquisition. Researchers have found that when reading stories aloud to children, there is a significant source of vocabulary acquisition (Danielson, 1990). As parents and teachers take time to discuss new words and help youngsters understand the meaning of them, the chance of the words being permanently retained in the children's memory is enhanced. As young children learn to acquire new vocabulary, their comprehension skills are also increased. Research further indicates that when children are exposed to books with new vocabulary, the context of

the story and illustrations help them expand their knowledge and understanding of the world (Danielson, 1990).

According to Kathy Danielson, an assistant professor of education at the University of Nebraska, children's literature is a "natural way" to discuss new words and concepts with children. Danielson (1990) states that "By listening to and reading literature, children learn more about language. Children's books may be used to generate an interest in language that carries over into children's own reading and writing" (p. 220).

Some of the methods to help children acquire new language skills is to create an interest in words with literature (Danielson, 1990). By using children's books, educators can make language and vocabulary development enjoyable and interesting for students. For example, teachers can find educating and entertaining books that teach children about synonyms and antonyms like *Nice or Nasty: A book of Opposites* (Butterworth & Inkpen, 1987). In this book, children learn the relationship of opposite concepts through words and funny pictures. To pique students' interest, teachers can encourage students to make their own synonym or antonym books by drawing and cutting out images from magazines.

Teachers can also use children's riddle books to educate children about homonyms, homophones or homographs. For example, Marvin Terban's *Eight Ate a Feast of Homonym Riddles* (1982) is a delightful resource that teaches children that some words are spelled and pronounced alike, but have different meanings. From colorfully illustrated books, children gain knowledge about different aspects of

language and easily grasp difficult concepts. Other children's books that are resourceful include books that teach figures of speech or idioms. There are also books that specifically teach about alliteration or similes, and teachers can use these kinds of books to help children practice a variety of language skills. According to Danielson (1990), "Sharing books that generate a language interest can stimulate children's thinking as well as teach them words in a meaningful context. Children will then become more aware of different types of language in their own reading, writing, listening and speaking" (p. 224).

Increasing Students' Achievement and Motivation. Various research studies show that literature has a positive effect on the academic achievement of children and that literacy skills are essential components of academic success (Ortiz, McCarty, 1997). In fact, motivation is closely related to students' academic achievement. When students are motivated to learn and find learning enjoyable, their achievement skills are also increased.

To help pique students' motivation, educators can explore and find books that can widen and sharpen students' experiences. Children's literature is a powerful way children can learn about themselves and about the world. Through stories, children can explore different cultures, discover historical people, examine exotic countries, and extend familiar experiences in new and exciting ways. By motivating children and building interest in what they learn, academic achievement will increase as students find learning enjoyable and enlightening.

Educators can also use literature to connect to other curricular areas such as science, math, and social studies. By using every genre of children's literature, learning is enhanced and understanding deepened. According to one study, children's literature is a valuable science tool (Barclay, Benelli, Schoon, 1999). By connecting literature and science, the teacher generates interest and motivation. The study reveals that an important component of this science curriculum is a classroom library filled with science-related children's literature. Whether the books are nonfiction or fiction, stories with scientific themes are gathered and children are encouraged to seek out books that interest them. These books not only help young children build on their literacy development but also help them learn valuable science skills: observing, comparing and predicting.

The study reveals that by integrating literature and teaching across the curriculum, literacy development and motivation are extended as students find interest in learning and learning becomes fun. Thus motivation is heightened, and achievement increased.

What Children Read Matters

Today's startling statistics reveal that our society is in deep moral trouble. The troubling trends and disheartening signs are everywhere: an omnipresent media culture that glorifies promiscuity and amorality, and violence throughout Hollywood; the daily coverage of sexual abuse, murder, homicide and violence in the news; and the rise in single-parent homes, divorce, and family feuds. In fact, the National Research Council

reported in 1992 that the U.S. is the most violent of all industrialized nations (Lickona, 1993).

This societal crisis is also taking a toll in our youth as they read violence in media. According to John Condry, a professor of human development and family studies at Cornell University, what children see on television are nihilistic messages that include an average of 25 acts of violence every hour. Furthermore, the average child will see 100,000 murders, assaults and rapes before he or she finishes the sixth grade (Garette, 1994). The crisis in our youth can be easily seen in these ten troubling trends: rising youth violence; increasing dishonesty (lying cheating and stealing); growing disrespect for authority; peer cruelty; a resurgence of bigotry on school campuses; a decline in work ethic; sexual precocity; a growing self-centeredness and declining civil responsibility; an increase in self-destructive behavior; and ethical illiteracy (Lickona, 1993).

Due to the ethical illiteracy of our youth, there's evidence that Americans are using literature to help teach young Americans about character (Dobrin, 1997). Numerous books have been written on character education, including *The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories,* compiled by the former secretary of education, William J. Bennett (1993). This book is a collection of short stories, tales, fables, psalms, and poems gathered together to teach various virtues and values. Bennett's book conveys to adult readers the significance of instilling and practicing various virtues. Because of its popularity, a children's version was created in 1995 called *The Children's Book of Virtues.* This book also brings together timeless and

classic stories with beautiful illustrations to instill values to children. The book illustrates and introduces to children the essentials of developing good character such as honesty, loyalty, courage, faith, responsibility, and self-discipline.

Teaching Morals and Values. According to author William Kilpatrick, children can learn good examples and develop moral reasoning skills by listening to stories. In his book *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong: Moral Illiteracy and the Wisdom of Society* (1992), Kilpatrick believes that stories are important avenues in which values and wisdom can be conveyed to children. He believes that stories can help children identify right from wrong, help transmit values, and convey visions. Stories can not only educate children but they also have the power to transform children's minds and alter their behaviors. Good stories will provide for youngsters a model to follow and also serve as an inspiration to lead morally upright lives.

With today's troubled youth crisis, there is a surge of interest in teaching character or values education in the public school curriculum. In addition, school districts such as Lowell Joint School District in La Habra, California have developed detailed character curriculum, highlighting virtues, such as civic responsibility, respect, and kindness. However, the place of teaching values in the public school curriculum is controversial (Suh, Traiger, 1999). Back when public schools began, developing and shaping of character was believed to be as crucial as academic training. Morality was explicitly taught by using the Bible as the primary curriculum. Even children's literature was created to instill moral values.

However, by the 1960s, it was politically incorrect for schools to have any special allegiance to Western culture or religion. Our nations history teachers insisted that we had no moral heritage to pass onto our children and the institution did not have the authority to impose values on the young (Ryan, 1996). Thus values education was far removed from the educational mindset, and for the past 30 years, our public schools have been "valuefree zones" (Ryan, 1996).

While history reveals that our schools once had a moral purpose, today's schools have stayed morally neutral for several decades. But the resurgence of character education in public schools is partly due to the alarming societal youth crisis. Today, it has become a trend to teach ethics and morality in the classroom. While teaching religious values in the classroom is both criticized and condemned, teaching values such as honesty, respect, care, responsibility, and respecting the rights of others are encouraged. Many believe that teaching values is fundamental and essential to a child's growth.

Children's literature is a significant and vital curriculum area in which moral reasoning can be taught in today's classroom (Suh, Traiger, 1999). Teachers can use powerful and ethically rich content for examining moral questions and engaging students' interests. Within the curriculum, teachers can integrate journal writing to help students explore their feelings and ideas from the literature they have read. Group discussions will help encourage students to be more reflective and also teach them to think critically. Students will also learn different perspectives by sharing with classmates and learn to problem solve. By engaging students in reading, writing, and

speaking activities about moral issues and values through literature, students will learn to identify right from wrong and learn valuable lessons that will challenge and build their moral reasoning skills.

Identifying the Sources of Power and Hope. One of the most powerful elements in reading good stories is that it can penetrate the heart with a collage of emotions that we experience throughout life. Literature can help people identify the sources of power and hope in their lives. Today, statistics reveal that many children who come from broken homes suffer emotional and behavioral problems, fail to achieve academically, and engage in drug abuse, alcohol, and sex (Lickona, 1993). The disruption in the family clearly shows that it has impacted schools tremendously and that teachers must face these students on a daily basis. With these at-risk children, literature has a special emotional appeal.

According to Cullinan (1992), the emotional impact of literature is magical. Children's literature can help children deal with a wide range of human emotions and human experiences. For example, in *When Emily Woke Up Angry* (Duncan, 1989), children learn about a young girl named Emily who wakes up angry and does not know how to deal with her anger. Throughout the story, Emily encounters many different animals and tries their methods of dealing with anger until she finds the one that works for her. Stories like Emily's help children explore ways they can express anger as they identify and learn from characters similar to themselves. The story teaches children to express their feelings in nonviolent ways and to deal with their problems in ways that are appropriate.

Well-written stories with identifiable characters help children cope with their feelings. Cullinan (1992) states, "When we read about characters who suffer shame or feel joy, we have compassion for them and understand their pain or happiness because we, too, have experienced these feelings. Sometimes we clarify our own emotions when we read about another's experiences in a book. Good writers are able to express feelings in words; sometimes they pinpoint feelings we didn't know we had until we read about them." (p. xv). For young children unable to express their feelings, powerful stories can help them identify their feelings and cope with their personal problems.

Cullinan (1992) discusses that powerful literature can influence children's lives in significant ways:

> Kafka once said, 'A book is an ax to break up the frozen sea within us.' This is precisely what books do for children; they melt the unformed, frozen sea of feelings and help young readers express what they know. Stories help children realize that they are not alone in facing whatever problems they meet. They give children the courage to be strong in the presence of difficult circumstances. They hoe out hope to every child who needs to know that one day he or she will be competent, successful, a winner. (p. xv)

Research shows that young children develop a better understanding and awareness of their problems by empathizing with characters in a book (Fouse, Morrison, 1997). Children's books have been used in schools and counseling sessions to

comfort students suffering with personal problems. Oral readings and teacher-led discussions have also been performed in group settings to facilitate children's understanding of peers with specific problems.

For example, children's books have been used as intervention for students with attention-deficit disorder (ADD). In addition, books like *Shelley, the Hyperactive Turtle* (Moss, 1989), explain the challenges of a child with ADHD through the eyes of a hyperactive turtle. This book educates students with ADHD, their families and friends about hyperactivity and how it affects the individual suffering from the disorder. The book also helps to open discussions on complex topics by simplifying it so children can easily understand and comprehend. Studies (Fouse, Morrison, 1997) reveal that by exercising book discussions with students with disorders, "children recognize that they are not alone in the problems they face and learn that it's okay to feel sad, hurt, or angry. Coping skills are developed as children model ways in which characters work through similar problems. These skills assist children in facing challenges and in maximizing their potential" (p. 442).

Using children's books to promote emotional growth involves three stages: identification, catharsis, and insight (Fouse, Morrison, 1997). In the first stage, the child personally identifies with a specific character in the book. Then through catharsis, the child expresses feelings or releases emotional tensions related to the problem. In the insight stage, the child learns to combine personal feelings with intellectual understanding.

Educators should be aware that discussing one book will not bring immediate results or solve problems. However, studies (Fouse, Morrison, 1997) show that "the more children read and internalize ideas from books, the more likely it is that there will be a positive impact on the children's attitude and behaviors" (p. 442). Therefore, educators can effectively utilize literature as a tool in developing children's emotional growth. Educators can also apply literature in nurturing positive attitudes and behaviors in children.

Developing Positive Attitudes & Behavior. Today, children of all ages face daily challenges in their lives. Some challenges test their physical endurance or mental strength; others challenge their inner courage and determination. Often children are confronted with situations in which they encounter experiences they have never known before and find it difficult to maintain positive attitudes. These circumstances or situations might include the loss of a loved one, a serious illness, suffering from persecution or prejudice, moving away from family and friends, or finding out the divorce of his or her parents. Children who face these problems often struggle with loneliness and need help in overcoming their emotional distress and pain. While it is difficult for some children to express their feelings when dealing with certain situations, literature can be used to help these children cope with their problems.

Children's books can imitate real-life situations and characters can model for students how to overcome specific situations. Books can teach children how a person can defy the odds and still maintain positive attitudes. For young children, listening to stories of how others overcome problems help them learn to deal with their own

dilemmas. For example, Eric Carle's *The Very Lonely Firefly* (1995) is a delightful story about a little firefly that overcomes loneliness. The story teaches about belonging and how this firefly's perseverance and energy help him overcome his problems as he goes in search of other fireflies. The final page is a grand reunion as fireflies light up the night through the magic of a tiny battery. The book is richly illustrated and accented with luminescent lights as children learn that despite the feelings of loneliness, they too can maintain a positive outlook.

Other books teach about survival or coming of age. In Kristine Franklin's *Eclispe* (1998), a 12-year-old girl named Trina faces serious family problems. In addition to her own pre-teenage concerns, Trina struggles to cope with her unemployed father who has a mental breakdown and her mother who is pregnant at age 48. She deals with difficult challenges and learns to maintain a positive attitude despite the current situation. In this example, children learn that there are others who suffer from similar family situations and learn that they are not alone. Children also learn how a character struggles with the changes in her family but learns to face and cope with the problem rather than run away from the situation. From stories such as this one, children learn examples of others overcoming difficult circumstances and coping skills are developed.

Children will learn from relating similar experiences in their own lives. Through literature, children learn about the surprises of growing up. Sometimes they learn that growing up can be both delightful and painful. Through characters that suffer similar problems or experience excitement, children also learn to deal with life's little miseries, such as bad haircuts, wearing braces, etc. Despite the challenges in their lives, literature

can be a tool in helping children overcome their own personal problems. Children's books can also develop positive attitudes as children relate their own lives to that of characters in stories.

Children's Exposure to Literature

Reading storybooks to young children profoundly affect their early literacy development (Kragler, Martin, 1998). Researchers believe that early book sharing is crucial for a child's literacy development (Kragler, Martin, 1998), and parent involvement is a crucial element to success in the classroom (Ortiz, McCarty, 1997).

Even before they begin formal literacy instruction, children who have prior experiences of books in the home often develop a desire to learn to read. Children who have been read to from an early age also acquire knowledge of narrative text, and garner much information about the world even before formal schooling. Children who have experience with literature demonstrate improved oral language and comprehension skills (Ouellette, Dagostino, Carifio, 1999).

Effective Home Environment. Children with experience in literacy activities at the home also appear to have early reading achievement (Ortiz, McCarty, 1997). Research reveals that families from a variety of cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic levels engage in various types of literacy activities within their home. The positive contributing factors at home include having their own books, being read to frequently by parents, using the library with family, and having parents model literacy activities. Studies also show that parents who participate in their children's literacy development have higher education than those who do not (Ortiz, McCarty, 1997). In

fact, parent involvement is a crucial element to success in children's literacy development.

When parents use basic home activities as opportunities to read with their children, research reveals that children continue to grow and build in their literacy development. Common familial literacy activities include reading for entertainment, general information, religious purposes and reading materials besides books. While parents can use children's literature to read with their children, it is evident that children learn and grow from various recreational related literary experiences in the home. For example, research illustrates that fathers engage in literacy activities with their children (Ortiz, McCarty, 1997). Father-child literacy activities include reading the newspaper, comic strips, children's magazines, and even instructions for children's board games. Fathers tend to participate in literacy activities that are recreational. For example, fathers help children read print found on board games (e.g., Monopoly, Life, etc.), and they play the word-game "hangman" with their children. Fathers also help their children do crossword puzzles or read and solve activities found on the back of cereal boxes (Ortiz, McCarty, 1997). In addition to recreational related activities, fathers read to their children personal letters from relatives.

The contribution that mothers have to early book reading is usually more significant to that of fathers since most mothers are considered children's first literacy teacher (Martin, 1998). From early on, mothers help children understand the meaning of print through the art of storytelling. Studies reveal that mothers interact with their children in daily book reading activities and assist in their children's oral language

development (Kragler, Martin, 1998). Mothers also use book reading to teach vocabulary to their children (Martin, 1998).

When reading stories to very young children, mothers deviate and simplify texts to help bring meaning to their children (Martin, 1998). For example, some mothers use dialogue to help their children understand better. By using and manipulating the language, mothers help their children focus on what is familiar rather than what is not. By scaffolding information to the child, mothers help their children understand, enjoy, and stimulate a response. Further, some mothers simplify vocabulary words (i.e.: "kitty" replaces the word "tiger") to bring familiarity and then uses children's previous knowledge to introduce and teach new concepts (Kragler, Martin, 1998). Mothers also use illustrations to extend the text and use discussions to further promote their children's language and reading development.

In a research study done by education faculty members (Linek, Rasinski, Harkins, 1997), teachers were asked about the importance of parent involvement in the classroom reading curriculum and in students' literacy development. About 90 percent of teachers responded that parent involvement was key in influencing student attitudes, motivation, and performance, while 10 percent remained neutral. In the same study, over 30 percent of teachers believed that some parents lacked interest in children's literacy development and parents did not volunteer in the classroom (Linek, Rasinski, Harkins, 1997). While teachers realize that many parents do not have the time to participate in the classroom due to job-related reasons, teachers realize the importance in partnering with parents in the literacy education of students. Teachers recognize that

parents can positively model literacy behavior and cultivate student motivation in the home.

Although parent participation in the classroom is infrequent and occasional, educators need to find alternative ways to encourage parents to actively engage in their children's literary development. Since not all parents know how to involve their children in home-related literacy activities, the following are a few suggestions to help teachers get parents involved with their children in the home (Ortiz, McCarty, 1997):

1. Have parents suggest the types of reading and writing activities they would like to share with their children.

2. Encourage parents to start with simple and informal activities, such as reading cereal boxes ads on subjects children find interesting.

3. Ask parents to take advantage of spontaneous reading activities that might occur in the home. Such activities include reading of mail, newspapers, magazines, labels, instructions, phone books, letters, etc.

4. Have parents use environmental print to teach their children. For example, parents can help students read signs, logos, and billboards that are on the way to school or the market. By doing so, children will understand that print has meaning and function.

Effective School Environment. According to reading specialist Linda Gambrell (1996), the teacher's role is critical in creating a classroom culture that fosters reading motivation in children's literature. Gambrell believes that every teacher has the power to inspire students to find pleasure in reading good books. Teachers can begin by

sharing appropriate selections from their personal readings with students. By doing so, teachers model for students how their own reading experiences have enriched their lives, given them pleasure, and helped them to become better writers and speakers. Furthermore, when teachers demonstrate that reading helps them learn more about the world, students are encouraged to do the same and learn to become voluntary lifelong readers.

The teacher's responsibility is significant in developing a literature-based curriculum and in creating a classroom environment in which children will love to learn and read from books and be enlightened by them (Cullinan, 1992). The teacher's role is also critical in creating a classroom culture that foster reading motivation. Researchers (Gambrell, 1995; Moser, Morrison, 1998) suggest several methods that are effective in inviting children into the world of children's literature and reveal that a literary classroom culture is characterized by the following: (a) the teacher serving as a reading model, (b) students immersed in a print-rich classroom environment, (c) students having opportunities to self-select books, (d) students having social interactions with others about books, and (e) literacy-related incentives that reflect the value of reading.

Studies further support the importance of children being immersed in a book-rich environment. Writer Charlotte S. Huck states, "One of the first things we can do is surround children with books, good books with exciting, well-written stories that will help convey the idea that reading is enjoyable. Storybooks shouldn't be something extra that we buy with lottery money. Good books are essential to education and should be at the top of every school's budget" (Cullinan, 1992, p. 3). Research further shows that by

increasing the number of books available to children in the classroom, the amount and quality of literacy experiences are positively effected (Gambrell, 1995). Therefore, a print-rich classroom environment is essential to nurturing the literacy development of young readers.

The principal's role is also significant in creating a balanced reading program and in promoting a literary classroom culture. One way for administration to assist teachers is to help improve the school libraries. According to Stephen Krashen in *Every Person a Reader* (1996), people need to recognize that there is a lack of resources in the school system, in the school libraries, and in the individual classrooms that would encourage literacy. Krashen believes that school libraries need to contain a variety of accessible reading materials. The most important aspect of school is to provide a print-rich environment for students.

Choice is also important in a print-rich classroom library. In order for children to have choice in selecting books, Huck believes that young children need to be exposed to all kinds of books including picture books, storybooks, poetry, songs, and informational books. Huck states that "Young children need to be able to relate reading to their own lives" (Cullinan, 1992, p. 12). Studies indicate that children who self-select books from their classroom libraries enjoy their books and find it interesting because they select the book for their own reason and purpose. It is important to provide a variety of choices for students to pique their interests as Huck suggests. Research reveals that students who choose their own reading materials put more effort in learning and understanding the material than those students who are assigned (Gambrell, 1995).

Jeff Lowe, a veteran teacher who holds workshops on building classroom libraries, emphatically believes in the importance of an effective classroom library. Lowe (1998) states, "I have developed a foolproof system for creating an A+++ classroom library, where children will plead for more silent reading time. It doesn't happen overnight, and it may even take a few years to reach your dream library, but the results—improved writing, language, reading, and other cross-curricular skills—will make it all worthwhile" (p. 61).

The first way to achieve an A+ in Lowe's "foolproof system" is to identify the needs of students and the purpose of building a classroom library. The teacher should consider the skill levels, developmental ranges, and interests of his or her students. By doing so, the library will have a focus and will appeal to a vast range of students. Lowe also encourages teachers to become knowledgeable about children's literature, reference books, and children's magazines. Huck agrees that "there is no substitute for knowing literature and being familiar with as many children's books as possible. Teachers need to read the books before they share them with children, buy them for their classroom libraries, or borrow them from a public library" (Cullinan, 1992, p. 12). Resources that will assist teachers in getting started include the Internet, online bookstores, and the school librarian.

Once the teacher has addressed the needs of students and has identified sources of help, the next A+ to earn is by acquiring the goods. Lowe states that many teachers spend much of their personal money on gathering materials and advocates the use of free and inexpensive ways to acquire goods. One way is to join book clubs like

Scholastic where you can generate points and earn free books. Another way is to ask for donations of old books at the end of the year. Teachers can also search at yard sales and thrift stores.

Finally, the importance of a dynamic display is essential to piquing students' interest in books. Lowe recommends that the display should include a variety of genres, reading levels, and cultures that students can choose from. By using thematic bulletin boards, teachers can provide a print-rich visual experience for students. Lowe also encourages teachers to have students take ownership and responsibility of the library and create an environment that is enjoyable yet educating for students.

Conclusion

Children's literature is a powerful way children can learn about themselves and about the world. Through stories, children explore different cultures, discover historical people, examine exotic countries, and extend familiar experiences in new and exciting ways. Storybooks help young children explore, investigate, interact with, and make sense of their surroundings. And literature is an effective tool in teaching morals and values, in helping children identify the sources of power and hope in their lives, and in developing positive attitudes and behaviors. Through an effective home and school environment, the power of children's literature in shaping the minds, attitudes, and values in children is endless.

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